

Energy and Commerce Environment and Climate Change Subcommittee Hearing
“Ban Asbestos Now: Taking Action to Save Livelihood and Lives”
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici Statement for the Record
May 8, 2019

Chairman Pallone, Chairman Tonko, Ranking Member Walden, and Ranking Member Shimkus, thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 1603, the Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act. I introduced this legislation to amend the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) to ban the importation, manufacture, processing, and distribution of asbestos and materials containing asbestos. Simply put, this bill will save lives.

It is estimated that asbestos-related diseases kill nearly 40,000 people in the United States every year. Despite these startling numbers, the majority of Americans don't know that asbestos and asbestos-containing materials are still being imported and produced in this country, and most people don't know that workers and communities still face a deadly risk from asbestos. In 2016, under the leadership of this Committee, Congress passed the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act to strengthen the management of dangerous chemicals under TSCA. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has failed to take meaningful steps available under TSCA to protect Americans from asbestos, and legislative action is needed to ban this deadly fiber once and for all.

H.R. 1603 takes important steps to protect communities and workers from asbestos. First, it explicitly bans the importation, manufacture, processing, or distribution in commerce of asbestos twelve months after enactment. The bill also requires reporting of all importation, manufacturing, processing, or distribution in commerce that takes place in the three years preceding the bill's enactment, and in the year between enactment and implementation of the ban. The bill provides a limited exemption for national security purposes, which can be granted for three years with a single three-year extension.

The bill also works to address the important issue of legacy asbestos. Because asbestos is a durable, fireproof fiber, it was used for decades in materials for houses, schools, and other commercial buildings. It can be found nearly everywhere - from insulation to flooring to paint. As asbestos fibers break down through natural processes or during demolition of buildings, the fibers are released into the air and can be inhaled and digested by humans. Tragically, it is not just workers with frequent exposure who are at risk - the fiber can attach to their clothing or hair and travel with them, endangering their friends, spouses, and children. The Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act requires that the EPA, in conjunction with the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services, undertake a nationwide survey of the prevalence of legacy asbestos and make recommendations to Congress for how to remove and dispose of asbestos and asbestos-containing waste and debris.

I am grateful for Chairman Pallone's leadership in holding this hearing, and for his steadfast commitment to providing strong protections for workers and communities across the country.